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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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LIFE WITH GREAT GRANDFATHER

The practical, vigorous character of the pioneers of Ontario is skilfully illustrated by a collection of models made to the scale of one inch to one foot by Mr. J.M. McCrea and generously lent to the Royal Ontario Museum. The same materials as were actually used by the pioneer are used in the models whenever possible. We may notice the emphasis on wood and the lack of iron.

These models conjure up for us the problems faced and solved by the early settlers. Here are small replicas of the tools and "machines" used in clearing and cultivating the land: the axe, the stumping and stoning machines, the drag or harrow closely resembling the forked branch of a tree, the sowing hopper used for "broadcasting", and the grain cradle, a practical North American invention by which two processes were carried out with one motion.

You may see in detail how to build a log cabin with wood as your only material. Elaborate models show a brick-making factory, a shingle-making shop, and an early Victorian carpenter's shop. Our debt to the Indians is recalled in the maple sugar rig and in some of the boats and sleds. The busy life of the pioneer is illustrated too in the model kitchen, the dairy with its cheese press, churns and butter firkin, the cider press, the spinning wheel, the leach for soap-making, and the pump and windlass.

All the models are based on the actual objects, many of which came from Omemee in Peterborough county, Ontario.

OPEN SHOP

No labour problems here! Working twenty-four hour shifts, day after day, the larvae (grubs) of the skin beetle, Dermestes, are helping the Museum in its business. They are unpaid but "skilled" workers engaged in preparing skeletons.

Formerly we used the time-honoured technique in making up skeletons. This tedious, smelly job included skinning, scraping, boiling, cleaning, and bleaching. Now with the help of the beetle larvae we employ a more efficient method. First the excess flesh is removed from the carcass which is then placed in a cupboard containing thousands of Dermestes larvae. The Dermestes eat the flesh. In a few weeks there is only the skeleton left. What beautiful work! The most delicate bones and cartilages are left exposed, in perfect condition.

In the Royal Ontario Museum, the collection of bones, an undertaking often neglected in museums, is rapidly growing. Such collections are very necessary since we are called upon to identify individual bones from dumps, Indian heaps, or even older deposits.

While we talk, the beetles work.

VISITORS FROM SPACE

Are you a star-gazer? Do you stand on clear evenings staring at the bright points of light in the great vault above? Suddenly one seems to tumble from the sky - a falling star or meteorite. Sometimes its arrival on this earth is observed, but more often its presence is discovered only by accident long afterward.

Meteorites are believed to be fragments of stars which have exploded and sent their parts speeding in all directions through space. If one of these fragments happens to enter the air of our world, the friction is so great that it glows white-hot and its surface melts. After it has landed and cooled, the meteorite often looks burned and rusty with numerous cavities like thumb-prints all over the surface.

These visitors from space vary greatly in size, from particles of dust to masses weighing several tons. They are of great interest because of the information which they give about our own earth and about our neighbours in the universe. Some of them are composed almost entirely of metal and look like pieces of rusty iron; others look like stones. When examined they are found to be very similar to what we have on earth or what we suspect that we have far down in the interior.

In the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum are many examples of these heavenly visitors, some in their complete state, some cut into slices so that their internal structure may be observed.

The First Aviators

Although we consider the Wright brothers as pioneers in the art of flying, they were approximately 300,000,000 years too late to be the first. According to Dr. M.A. Fritz, of the Royal Ontario Museum, this title should go to Stenotheca lobata, or perhaps to Haplophlebium barnesi. It is true that these extinct creatures were not trans-Atlantic clippers nor even short range bombers - they were merely large insects that dwelt in the dismal swamps which covered Nova Scotia and Pennsylvania and many other parts of the world during the Coal Age.

Paintings of these ancestral dragon flies based upon actual fossilized remains are dramatically portrayed in the beautiful murals that decorate the galleries of palaeontology. Here with a wing spread of two feet or more they may be seen among the ancient vegetation of giant seed-ferns, horsetails, and club mosses.

Open WEEK DAYS except MONDAY 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
SUNDAYS 2 p.m. - 5 p.m.